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OUR SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER

by

Courtney Collado

BFA, New York University/Tisch School of the Arts
1998

Presented in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master in Fine Arts in Dance

Hollins University
Roanoke, Virginia
December 2021

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Dedication

For my son, Kellan. I love you more than stars love fire; I love you more than anything.

Acknowledgements

Immeasurable thanks to every individual who has supported and inspired me to renew and continue a life in the arts, and especially those who pushed me and guided me through this journey with Hollins University.

To my village who helped keep my son thriving and happy while I travelled to complete my MFA: there is no way I could have done this without you.

To the friends and colleagues who made it through Hollins before, during, and after my time here: each of you have informed and shaped my practice and my art making in incalculable ways.

To Jeffery Bullock, Rebekkah Chappell, Melinda Rawlinson: thank you for providing guidance, support, patience, and unimaginable learning opportunities, even through a pandemic and countless pivots.

To the creative team scattered around the Northern Hemisphere who contributed to the success of my film – Lauren Schrader, Alden Miller, Jeramy Zimmerman, Sid Hoffman (KCMO), Liz Whitmere (Toronto, ON), Evangelos Spanos (KCMO) – you brought this project to life. I feel so fortunate to have been able to make this work with you.

To the friends who have been sounding boards, editors, test audiences, and moral support: you are my family. I love you unconditionally.

To 9-year-old Meila Ashman, who jumped in at the literal eleventh hour to star in an experimental dance film and acted with such grace, drive, maturity, and professionalism, and her mother Alex Porto: you are an inspirational pair. I'm so excited to see where life leads you.

To Berlin and Ciela: the hours working on this with you sleeping on my lap were some of the most meaningful in my life.

To my husband, my love, Byron Greene, who has been with me through this journey from across the world and back: we are here. Marrying you in the chapel at Hollins was possibly the best decision I've ever made. Your unwavering support and understanding while I muddled through this process, finding and losing myself over and again, reminds me of how absolutely blessed Kellan and I are to have found you.

Lastly, may we all remember the children who went to school one day and never came home. May we all take action for them, and for their parents...who still sway.

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Artist Statement

I am a mother. I am an artmaker, a dancer, an educator. The topic of school rampage shootings affects the way I embody each of my identities – individually, and at varying intersections. This work, this paper, this research, this film, are all pieces of the puzzle fitting together to show me how to be present when I create. I want to know how we, as a nation, as a quilt of communities, arrived at this point in our history where we accept children being murdered at school as “normal” – there is absolutely nothing normal about dying violently at school. There is nothing normal about anxious mothers and fathers trembling behind police tape, hoping theirs isn’t the child being carried out of school in a body bag; nothing normal about gigantic bullet holes in tiny bodies.

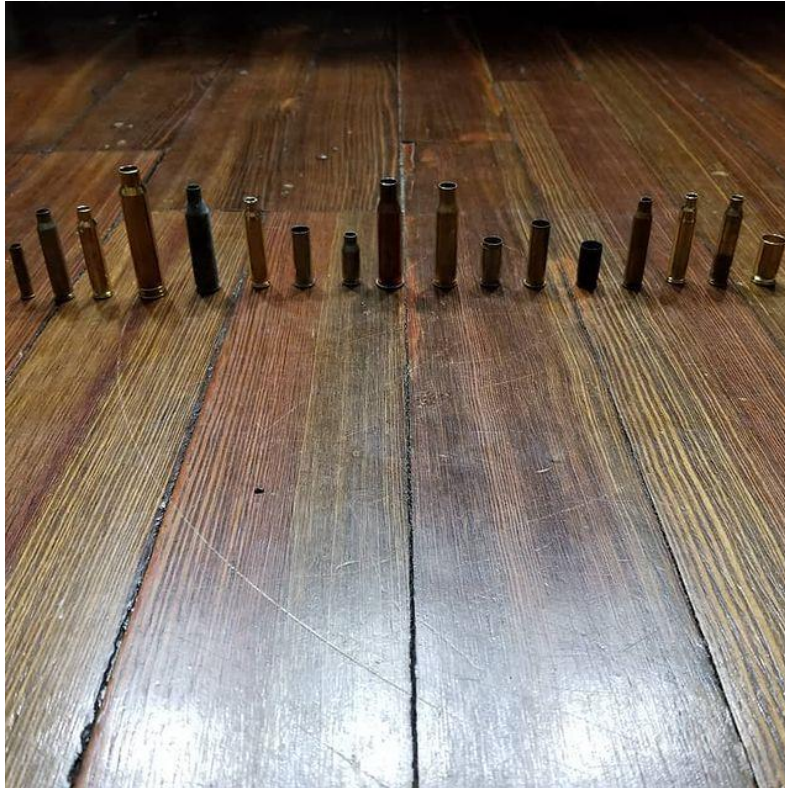
I embarked on this work with the expectation that I would emerge as a stronger activist, firmly on the side of a complete ban on guns in America. While I find myself a stronger activist, I have come to terms while creating this project that there will always be guns in America. I refuse to accept, however, that children and teachers dying at school, or people going about their workday/dancing at a club/worshipping in churches and temples/shopping in malls/attending concerts are merely collateral damage in the fight for the right to bear arms.

There is a better way. If I convince even one person to contribute to public awareness about gun safety through this work, if my film inspires even one person to become active in gun sense initiatives in their communities, we can find our way to a reality where school shootings are no longer a weekly occurrence.

Foreword

I learned in Savannah, Georgia, in front of the house where a 16-year-old boy shot and killed his 13-year-old girlfriend, with my face pressed into the asphalt of her driveway alongside a fresh memorial of pink balloons and pink teddy bears, that no scale exists to measure the relative horror of gun violence. Every single shooting is **the most terrible** shooting.

Artist Maureen Cain, “United States of Ammunition”



*Figure 1. Photo by Courtney Collado, January 2020.
Part of an image study quantifying deaths with bullet casings. This image depicts the number of people shot (2 killed, 15 injured) at a nightclub in Kansas City on January 20, 2020.*

As a mother, I sway. I sway when I hold my too-big-to-be-held 9-year-old son on Sunday mornings while we listen to music as our bacon cooks in the oven. I sway when I hold my dogs. I sway when I’m alone and indulging memories of my no-longer-a-baby baby. The work below, by artist Jami Milne prompted me to respond in poetry when I

found myself feeling angered, grief-stricken, and paralyzed against the seeming endless incidents of rampage shootings in American schools.

A peer sent me a picture of Jami Milne's "VISUALIZING DEAD BODIES," a room full of white balloons representing victims of school shootings. I searched and found the artist's commentary and more images of the installation. Her mention of swaying - a universal movement performed to soothe, comfort, or celebrate a child in one's arms - and the anthropomorphic qualities of the balloons were instantly relatable to me as a parent, and as an artist.

VISUALIZING DEAD BODIES/MARCH 6, 2018

If that title comes off too strong, you're probably not my audience for this post. That's not to say you won't read it, but it is to say that you already get it.

My son goes to an elementary school that teaches Cognitive Guided Instruction. CGI, in this instance, refers to a child's intuitive approach to problem solving. I first became familiar with this methodology when my son shared with me his math worksheets in which he was drawing bags of apples in order to multiply how many he had in total.

I was thinking about this ability to problem solve through visualization as I was placing 164 balloons within the Des Moines Social Club last night. Perhaps part of our problem, as a society of adults, is that we've forgotten how to problem solve through visualization. To those who don't get it, let me help you see:

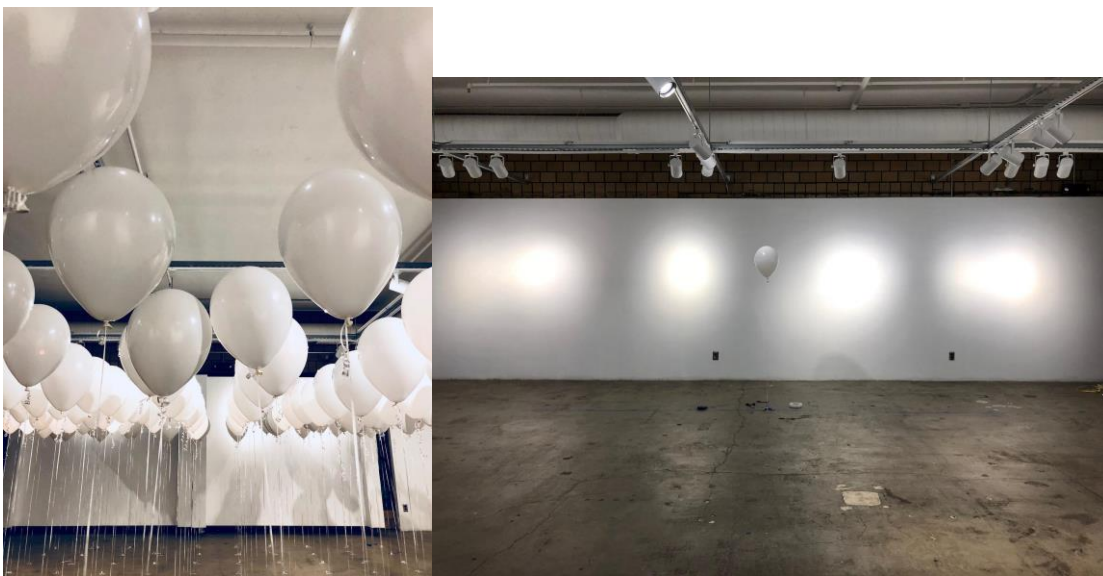


Figure 2. Images from Jami Milne's installation of "Visualizing Dead Bodies" March 6, 2018.

Are you a mother? Is your wife or partner? There's a funny thing that happens when you become one. You sway. You hold your baby in the safety of your arms, and you sway. Back and forth, in what may have started as a move to a lullaby, but forever remains long after the music is gone. You never stop swaying once you start.

The first balloon swayed when placed. I visualized a mother, that never again gets to hold her baby. Never again gets to sway. Did you know 20 six-year-olds were shot to death at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012? Twenty mothers who swayed now stand still. Twenty six-year-olds, twenty tiny bodies, were shot between three and eleven times each.

Can you visualize that?

Can you still tell me we don't need stricter gun laws?

...Will this installation save one more child or teacher from being gunned down in the safety of a school? No. Will this installation change gun laws? No. Could our Republican representatives? Yes...

Artist Jami Milne, "Visualizing Dead Bodies"



Figure 3. "Visualizing Dead Bodies" by Jami Milne. Des Moines, Iowa, March 2018.

Another mother stops swaying

Gunshots
Bodies drop
Another mother stops swaying

Politicians thinking and praying don't hear what we're saying
Another mother stops swaying

Coin-filled pockets build more rockets
Another mother stops swaying

NRA buys our rights away
Another mother stops swaying

From the womb
To the tomb
We don't matter 'til we vote

Before we're born under lights, we have more rights
We don't matter 'til we vote

Another mother stops swaying

School kids mowed down
AR-15's don't slow down
Another mother stops,
swaying

Rocked babies in our arms now they're taking up arms
Another mother stops

swaying

Uniforms, unicorns, forlorn, war-torn
We don't matter 'til we vote

NRA buys your rights away

#2A

Another mother stops swaying.

-Courtney Collado

Introduction

I find myself at the intersection of my positioning as a mother to an American schoolchild, my lived experience of growing up amidst gun culture, and emergence as a gun-sense¹ activist. At the time of this writing, in December of 2021, news is circulating about the most recent rampage shooting in a high school in suburban Detroit, MI, where four students were killed, six students and one teacher injured. The shooter, a white, male, 15-year-old high school sophomore, is in custody facing multiple charges of



*Figure 4: Photo by Courtney Collado, January 2020.
From my series of images using bullet casings to quantify deaths. 20 AR-15 bullet shells lined up with my son's first grade Jordans, depicting the number of first grade students violently murdered in the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting with the type of bullet used in the massacre.*

¹ “Gun sense” refers to a collection of reforms and actions individuals and governing bodies could institute that would greatly reduce the number of firearm-related deaths and injuries in the United States. Included in gun-sense initiatives are “red flag laws” which allow family members or individuals to petition a court for the temporary removal or prohibition of firearms from a person who is deemed reasonably dangerous to themselves or others. Other gun sense initiatives, or “common sense gun laws” include a limit to the number of live rounds (bullets) a magazine (bullet clip) purchased by a civilian can legally hold, making gun trafficking a federal crime, prohibiting the sale of military-style and assault rifles to civilians and removing same from our communities, and passing a law requiring universal background checks and waiting periods for any individual wishing to purchase a firearm.

murder and terrorism. In an unusual move, his parents have been charged with involuntary manslaughter.² Rarely are the parents of students who commit school shootings held responsible for the carnage wrought by their children.

The move by the prosecutor in Oxford, Michigan, to detain and charge a school-shooter's parents is significant. My research for this paper suggests that the epidemic of school rampage shootings will not be solved by an all-or-nothing approach to gun control (i.e. a complete ban of firearms)³, but has led me to hypothesize that enacting national gun sense legislation⁴ and supporting initiatives led by parents of American students - including restricting children's' access to guns and holding parents accountable for their weapons being used in mass shootings – comprise a plan for action to effect lasting change.

America consistently ranks second for number of gun-related deaths per year, on the heels of Brazil which ranks first. In 2021, according to *Gun Violence Archive*,⁵ a website that tracks gun deaths and injuries by age, location, and incident daily, the US has tallied 33,513 firearm-related deaths in 2021. A similar website, *worldpopulationreview.com* reports an average of 40,175 gun deaths in the U.S. per

² On Tuesday, November 30, 2021, in Oxford, MI, 15-year-old Ethan Crumbley fired over 30 rounds directly at students and teachers from a semiautomatic handgun his parents had given him as an early Christmas gift on November 26. Earlier in the day, Ethan's parents had been called to school when a teacher saw a disturbing and threatening picture he had drawn. The parents were told Ethan had to begin counseling within 48 hours; they resisted removing him from school and he was sent back to class, with his new gun loaded and hidden in his backpack. Shortly thereafter, at 12:51 pm local time, he opened fire on his classmates and went on a shooting rampage through his school's hallways.

³ Adam Winkler, *Gun Fight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*, p 10: in 2013, the author wrote "A gun-free America is a profoundly unrealistic goal. There are approximately 280 million guns in the United States, almost one per person." According to *worldpopulationreview.com* as of September 2021, current estimates suggest that there are 393,347,000 guns in America, with a population of 332,915,073, or an average of 120 guns per 100 people in the U.S. Put simply, there are far too many guns in America to effectively enact a "ban" on firearms.

⁴⁴ Activists and lawmakers across the United States use the term "gun sense" to refer to any of an array of common-sense, fact-based measures proposed to effectively reduce gun violence.

⁵ "Gun Violence Archive." Accessed October 1, 2021. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>.

year.⁶ Countries with low rates of gun violence including Japan, Australia, Norway, and the UK have passed strict legislation and/or implemented incentives to disarm the populace. Notably, Australia implemented a buy-back program which amassed a reported 600,000 firearms from their population of roughly 25 million citizens.⁷ One could make a specious argument about the possible law-abiding/community-minded nature of Australian citizens or reduce the effectiveness of Australian gun-control efforts to a game of numbers (fewer people=fewer guns to confiscate); nonetheless, the reality is that America harbors 666 times as many guns as were confiscated in Australia. While a buyback incentive or a mass meltdown of surrendered firearms would certainly reduce American gun deaths, has been all but written off as a possibility in the United States.

In the U.S., women carry most of the responsibility for childcare and the emotional labor of caring for children, and nearly one quarter of homes are supported by a single mother.⁸ Over the course of this thesis project, I explored the tropes and labors assigned to the role of “mother” in America. As the mother of a school-aged boy, I cracked open and unpacked that with which I am familiar: the gender norms placed on mothers manifesting in the emotional and temporal burden of loving, parenting, caretaking, *mothering* a child.

⁶ “Gun Deaths by Country 2021,” *World Population Review*, Accessed September 3, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gun-deaths-by-country>.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Pew Research Center published a blog post in May 2019 highlighting the challenges faced by contemporary American mothers. Among the findings, it was determined that although American women are becoming mothers later in life, more women are choosing motherhood than in previous decades. Women are spending more time at work *and* more time parenting than in the latter half of the 20th century, and roughly 25% of American mothers are single parents. A.W. Geiger, Kristen Bialik and Gretchen Livingston, “6 Facts about U.S. Moms.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/08/facts-about-u-s-mothers/>

I realized after several iterations of proposals that the accumulation of my lived experiences combined with my research on the history of gun control in America and school rampage shootings would best be represented through the creative manifestation of a film; a screendance to take the viewer through the looking glass and into the mother's subconscious as she sends her child off to school. I also investigated that which I desperately wish to understand: how American gun culture combined with political inertia paved the way for the epidemic phenomenon of rampage shootings in American schools.

Mechanics of the Morning Ritual

Each morning, many American homes with school-aged children run like a machine, with no time to spare for deviation. In my creative manifestation, the film *our sheep to slaughter* opens on a mother performing the minutiae of a weekday morning, preparing breakfast, and getting her daughter ready for school. No father is present. A bag of oranges spills from the top shelf of the refrigerator onto the floor, oranges bouncing all over the kitchen: an unplanned cleanup stealing precious seconds of time from the morning routine.

The daughter bounds downstairs, grabbing her mother from behind in a tight embrace as she is finishing the unplanned cleanup. With no time for affection, the mother slips out of her daughter's embrace, keeping contact with her but physically moving her out of the kitchen in an attempt to show the desire for affection and longing for more time with her daughter, juxtaposed with the need to remain in motion to get her daughter off to school on time, lest the entire morning - and rest of the workday - be disrupted. The

daughter takes her seat, takes a last bite of her cereal, and plays quietly across from her mother. Upon closer inspection, we see that the daughter is playing with and stacking projectiles - bullets - of all different sizes and shapes. Mother slices an orange, packs it up in a colorful lunch box, and they collide en route to the front door.

The camera follows the pair down a hallway where once again, daughter grabs mother from behind in a tight embrace. Mother playfully lifts and moves her daughter toward the door without missing a step. At the door, the daughter slips into her backpack, and the pair continue out the front door onto the patio for daughter's rushed sendoff. Just a normal morning.

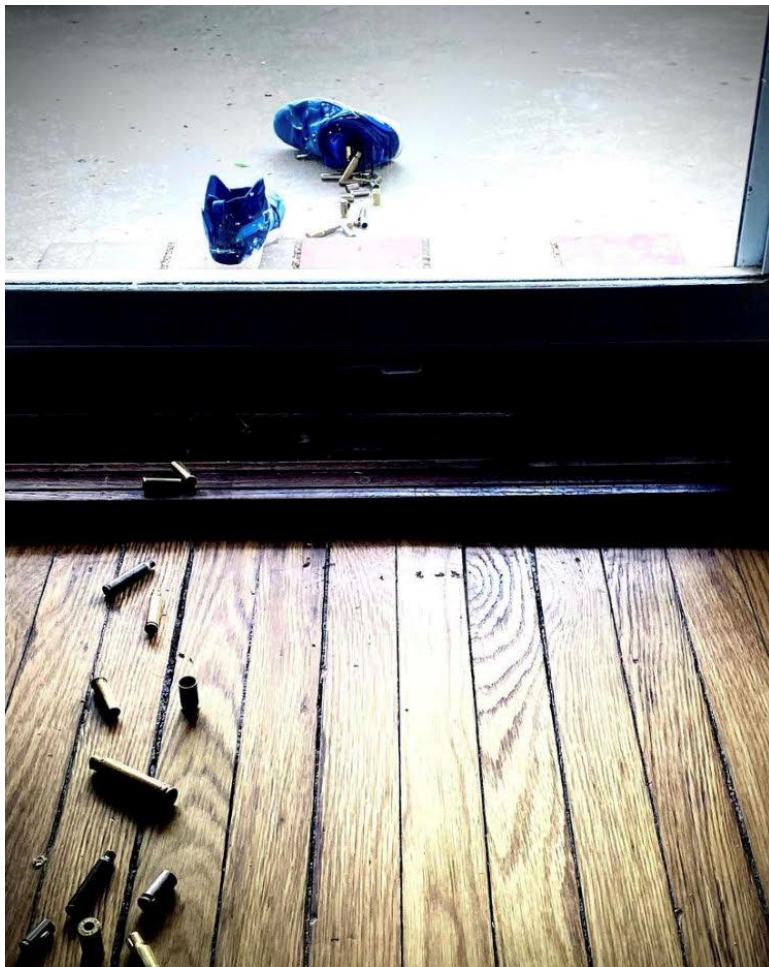


Figure 5. Photo by Courtney Collado, April 2021. A trail of fired bullet casings lead to an overflow of brass from a pair of children's shoes across the threshold of a glass door.

Mothering in America

Kyle and Kevin didn't come home at all
The phone hit the floor when their mother got the call
And all the newsmen were having a field day
And all the cops were having a ball
Saying "gangsters kill each other, but these Goth kids kill 'em all!"
Rorschach Test, "Educated Hate"

Gun violence claiming children's lives in schools is a uniquely American problem. In no other developed nation are children at such incredible risk for deadly violence: during the nine year period spanning January 2009 and May 2018 every other major industrialized country reported two or fewer school shootings, while the US tallied 288.⁹ Between 2009 and 2019, 180 schools experienced shootings, leaving 356 people dead on school grounds, and at least 200,000 surviving students affected by the repercussions of witnessing gun violence.¹⁰ These incidents are not relegated to schools that serve a specific demographic or location; shootings on school grounds are reported at urban, suburban, and rural schools. Race is a determining factor in the time of day an incident is likely to occur, and the number of victims claimed per incident: when the shooter is a white male, the number of casualties increases exponentially.¹¹ I have no intention of being reductive; however, my research illuminated one single cause of, and one simple solution to deadly gun violence on school grounds in the United States: access to firearms, especially those with high-capacity magazines.¹² However, this is a

⁹ Thomas Gabor, *ENOUGH! Solving America's Gun Violence Crisis*, p. 1

¹⁰ cnn.com, Christina Walker, "10 Years. 180 School Shootings. 356 Victims." Accessed April 9, 2021

¹¹ Ibid

¹² A high-capacity magazine refers to the part of a gun that holds ammunition, aka a "clip" or "cartridge." Most magazines hold 10 rounds of ammunition (bullets); high-capacity magazines are defined as any magazine that is designed to hold more than 10 bullets. Military AR-15 rifles, pistols, and other firearm magazines average 30 rounds. Military and military-style assault weapons (favored by school shooters) and high-capacity magazines serve the purpose of maximum destruction, the highest number of deaths in the shortest possible amount of time.

complicated, volatile, issue that triggers arguments ranging the gamut from a constitutional right to bear arms, behavior intervention and punishment in schools, toxic masculinity and entitlement, racial and wealth disparities, family models, and politics. Rampage shootings at American schools are the result of failures at many levels and within myriad intersecting systems.

This project explores the inner conflict of an American mother acknowledging the risk inherent in sending her child(ren) to school, accepting that she may be leading them like a flock to slaughter. No longer shocked when another rampage shooting makes the news, she hopes her child is not one of the bodies in the next wave of small, lifeless, bloodied, perforated bodies carried out of their school under the prying eyes of the nation. She hopes her neighbors store their guns safely so her child's classmates can't bring their parents' guns to school. There is a macabre understanding that *this is just the way it is* because America's elected leaders, school boards, and community organizers have proven wholly ineffective at solving this public health crisis. American parents grudgingly accept that we may send our child to school warm, breathing, and alive in the morning and be asked to identify their cold, bullet-riddled corpse in the afternoon.

I acknowledge that the images in my creative manifestation may be provocative and/or disturbing to some viewers; this is intentional. What should follow a viewing of this work? Discourse exposing and dissecting the normalization of gun culture, the ubiquitous presence of unsecured firearms in homes all over America. As I drafted this work, I wanted to find a way to quantify the deaths of children in school temporally, perhaps represent the number of children and teachers shot at school in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, but, sickeningly, the tally runs on. There is no way to

accurately quantify injuries and deaths sustained by gun violence in “safe” places in America on any given day.

We Say Goodbye

“They said there was a girl in surgery and a girl coming out of MRI...They said the girls looked so much alike, they didn’t know who was who...I remember a doctor running and screaming **“A mom’s coming, a mom’s coming, get her ready.”** And we went into a trauma room. And Nicole was lying there on a gurney in the middle of the room...they were bagging her. She still had a smile on her face.”¹³

There is an experience specific to American parents sending their children to school each morning: accepting the possibility that the next time they reunite, it is for the parent to identify the child’s remains, their body cold, riddled with bullets. While the United States is home to only five percent of the world’s population, nearly one-third of global mass shootings occur here annually.¹⁴

For nearly four decades, parents and students in America have been mobilizing to effect change in gun laws that would prevent or reduce the occurrence of rampage shootings in schools.¹⁵ For nearly four decades, politicians have been offering their thoughts and prayers after each preventable school rampage shooting but making little headway in the fight for gun sense legislation.

In a letter to a gun sense activist written in 1999, Senator John McCain wrote:

¹³ Katherine Newman, Cybelle Fox, David J. Harding, Jal Mehta, and Wendy Roth, *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*, p. 7

¹⁴ World Population Review. “Gun Deaths By Country 2021.” Accessed September 3, 2021.

¹⁵ Newman et al., *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*.

...raising our children is our most profound responsibility. We are failing that responsibility, and the extent of our failure is being measured in the deaths and injuries of our kids in the school yard and on the streets of our neighborhoods and communities. Our children are killing each other, and they are killing themselves.¹⁶

President Obama, 15 years later, echoed the same sentiment when addressing the nation after the 2014 rampage shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut which claimed the lives of 20 first grade students between the ages of five and seven, and six educators:

As a country, we have been through this too many times. Whether it's an elementary school in Newtown, or a shopping mall in Oregon, or a temple in Wisconsin, or a movie theater in Aurora, or a street corner in Chicago -- these neighborhoods are our neighborhoods, and these children are our children. And we're going to have to come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like this, regardless of the politics.¹⁷

Donald Trump, as President nearly four years later in February of 2018, again stresses the importance of keeping children safe at school after the rampage shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida which claimed 17 lives:

No child, no teacher, should ever be in danger in an American school. No parent should ever have to fear for their sons and daughters when they kiss them goodbye in the morning. Each person who was stolen from us yesterday had a full life ahead of them – a life filled with wondrous beauty and unlimited potential and promise. Each one had dreams to pursue, love to give, and talents to share with the world. And each one had a family to whom they meant everything in the world.¹⁸

It is reasonable to assume that amid lockdown restrictions and closed schools due to the novel coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021, incidents of mass shootings in the United States would have declined. On the contrary, 2020 was one of the deadliest years

¹⁶ Karina Bland, "Bland: Old Letter from John McCain Shows How Little Has Changed in 20 Years of Gun Debate." The Arizona Republic. Accessed June 30, 2021. <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/karinabland/2018/06/05/john-mccains-letter-shows-gun-debate-hasnt-changed-much/668260002/>.

¹⁷ Megan Slack, "President Obama Speaks on the Shooting in Connecticut," December 14, 2012. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/12/14/president-obama-speaks-shooting-connecticut>.

¹⁸ CNN. "Read Trump's Speech Addressing the Parkland School Shooting | CNN Politics," February 15, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/15/politics/transcript-trump-parkland-shooting/index.html>.

in America, attributed not only to Coronavirus deaths, but to gun violence. 600 mass shootings occurred in the United States in 2020, up from 417 in 2019.¹⁹ Between January 1 and June 21 of 2021, 9 children had been murdered at school, with a running tally of 16 mass shootings across the country.²⁰ As of October 1, 2021, there were 82 recorded incidents of gunfire at U.S. schools, leaving 21 dead and 47 injured.²¹ Common sense gun laws and proven methods of gun control that reduce the lethality of a firearm²² are met with hostile resistance in America. Many people feel gun ownership is part of their identity and culture, and any attempt to regulate or reduce the lethality of their firearms is a personal affront.²³ In contrast to countries including Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom which enacted swift and sweeping gun-control laws in the wake of mass shootings,²⁴ the US failed to pass any significant federal gun laws for more than 25 years:

As of 2021, there were no federal laws banning semiautomatic assault weapons, military-style .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity magazines. There was a federal prohibition on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines between 1994 and 2004, but Congress allowed these restrictions to expire.²⁵

¹⁹ “Number of Deaths in 2020 | Gun Violence Archive.” Accessed January 22, 2020. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/reports/number-of-gun-deaths>.

²⁰ These 16 shootings occurred between January 1 and June 21, 2021 and encompass more than shootings on school grounds.

²¹ Everytown For Gun Safety. “The Long, Shameful List of Gunfire on School Grounds in America.” Everytown Research & Policy. Accessed October 1, 2021. <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/gunfire-on-school-grounds/>

²² The term “common sense gun laws” refers to non-invasive measures that could effect greater gun safety in the United States. Common sense measures include but are not limited to universal background checks and mandatory waiting periods for individuals wishing to purchase a gun and making gun trafficking a federal crime. Banning high-capacity magazines would effectively make a firearm less lethal: fewer bullets in a magazine = fewer deaths on a rampage.

²³ Winkler, *Gun Fight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*, pp. 9-10

²⁴ Council on Foreign Relations. “U.S. Gun Policy: Global Comparisons.” Accessed September 3, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-gun-policy-global-comparisons>.

²⁵ Ibid

At the state level, laws are actively *loosening* restrictions on firearms, eliminating required permits, allowing domestic abusers to purchase weapons, allowing “open carry” and enacting Stand Your Ground laws.^{26,27}

Spiral/Descent

As the film moves into the second scene, the mother turns back to the door of the house after she has watched her daughter run down the sidewalk to school. Not realizing she still has the lunchbox in her hand, she opens the door. As she passes the threshold, her home has been replaced by a black void; her door is gone, replaced by a bright orange door in a white frame that can spin and move through the space.

Time has no meaning in this space. The door leads nowhere - not back to her home and safety, not to another space or time. She is stuck.

The door in this film represents a fissure in reality; the moment when a mother allows her anxiety over her child’s safety to move to the forefront of her imagination. Intrusive thoughts, worries, panic, and obsession take over and wrap around like vines her normal morning thoughts: Breakfast. Backpack. School. Work. - and the barrage of fears and images floor her mind. Her daughter appears in this space but slips through her fingers. A plate of fresh sliced oranges appears out of the ether, a memory from moments ago, tangled with her anxiety. As mother follows daughter through the space, the floor becomes littered with bullet shells, projectiles, and toy jacks - representing not just the nonchalance with which children are raised in gun culture to handle firearms,

²⁶ Gabor, *ENOUGH! Solving America’s Gun Violence Crisis*, p. 3

²⁷ “Open Carry” refers to carrying a firearm in public, in a visible holster or otherwise not concealed. Many US states do not require a permit to open carry. “Stand Your Ground” refers to state laws that do not enforce a duty to retreat when threatened and allow for citizens to use deadly force to neutralize the perceived threat.

but also how benign objects such as colored pencils or safety scissors, both far less injury-producing than stepping on a metal jack in the dark, are held in the tiny hands of school children as protection against an armed intruder in a lockdown. The daughter plays with the bullets as if they are jacks, these lethal projectiles and their detritus reduced to toy status.

As mother reaches her daughter's sneakered feet, she once again slips from grasp. Mother is again stuck at the bottom of this spiral, seeing no way out and no way to find her child. She looks up, and sees a trail of bullet shells, jacks, and red balls leading to the orange door, beckoning her to move through.



Figure 6. Photo by Courtney Collado, January 2020.

Nearly every morning that I send my son to school, like most mothers I've asked, for just a moment I allow myself to worry that this could be the last morning I see my son alive, to soak up his scent, feel his arms around me as we hug, enjoy the smooth skin of the tip of his nose against mine as we move through our goodbye rituals. I do not know if "it is possible that my child could die at school today" is an unusual thought. I do not think it is a thought unique to American mothers; however, I do feel it is unique to mothers in developed nations that are not actively involved in armed conflict. Indeed, this is a common rumination in the United States, where many parents routinely purchase guns for their teenage boys as gifts, without a second thought.

Many American parents experience a unique dread that accompanies a call from their child's school in the middle of the school day or workday. When I see my phone light up with a call from my son's school, two thoughts run through my head:

1. My child is ill; I must drop everything, go pick them up, and cancel all activities and appointments for the next 24-48 hours.
2. This is a school-wide call about an incident at school; my child is hurt, or worse...

Each mother with whom I spoke about this project mentioned the call-from-school as causing them anxiety specifically about a rampage shooting at their child's school, without prompting from me.

I unintentionally spoke exclusively with mothers because those were the parents that, incidentally, did school drop-offs or pick-ups, were able to meet for coffee after drop-off or a playdate after school pickup. Because this labor of

caretaking appears to follow outdated gender norms and fall generally on the shoulders of mothers, I chose to keep my casting for this project as a mother and daughter. Mothering in America is a story I can tell; fathering in America is not. As I did not have access to many fathers of my son's classmates (especially considering it was a pandemic year), I have no accounts to rely on from fathers who may experience the same worry and anxiety about their children's safety at school. I can surmise from news coverage and books that there are many fathers who understand and grudgingly accept the reality of their child's level of risk at school, but I have no first-hand accounts. I have been my son's primary caretaker for his entire life; even now, remarried to a man who equitably shares the labors of housekeeping and parenting, my husband works (for income) long(er) hours, farther away, so I perform the lion's share of parenting labor in its myriad forms.

As the mother walks through the orange door to continue her journey, she enters a wide-open, lush, green landscape. Standing atop the precipice of a steep hill, she looks back through the door, but there is no evidence of the void from which she just emerged. The orange door is flung open, awkward against blue sky and green grass; her eyes survey the landscape, and she sees, below her, a triangle labyrinth enclosed in glass. She must get to it; she must find her daughter.

She is flung down the hill, rolling uncontrollably, gravity pulling her downward to the labyrinth. Her descent into the full force of a nightmare. As she gets up, she sees her daughter walking away from her, bullets falling around her feet. She runs to catch up but cannot make her way to her child. At every corner, her

daughter's reflection multiplies, moves backward, then emerges again on the other side of the labyrinth. Each time she almost catches up to her child, she is just out of reach. Bullets and jacks litter the ground.

As she is about to give in, her daughter communicates through layers of glass. They move together, inches away yet miles apart. At last, her daughter appears next to her, and once again they move as one, mother lifting child, child orbiting mother. Just as soon as she appears, she fades from sight and the orange door has materialized at the edge of the labyrinth, with her daughter's backpack. She grabs the pack, opens it, and an endless stream of bullets, jacks, and oranges fall around her feet, a jumble of memories real and imagined. With the bag in her arms, she turns to the door, places her hand on the knob.

In My Arms (again)

I have worried about my son dying from a gunshot wound since before he could speak full sentences.

Tangled in a marriage separation from a police officer with untreated PTSD²⁸ and an arsenal of firearms at his disposal at work and in his home, I would send our then-two-year-old son to visit his father not sure I would see my child alive again. Accounts of angry husbands and fathers murdering their children to enact revenge against their former wives and mothers of their children are in no shortage. Every time before my child visited

²⁸ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) refers to a psychiatric disorder that occurs in people who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic experience. My former husband deployed to Afghanistan as a Marine, and while he suffered greatly from nightmares and extreme emotional reactions to minor stressful stimuli, he did not ever seek counseling or therapy. After the birth of our son, he became a police officer and his responses to stress amplified. My assertion that he suffers from PTSD is not a diagnosis; rather, a conclusion reached after years of marriage and interpersonal dysfunction. At the time of our separation, his moods and personality were erratic, conflicting, and confusing, and often threatening. At time of writing, these concerns are still present.

his father I held him tightly, breathed him in, felt his racing heart pressed against mine (my heart outside my body) and memorized the rhythm of his lungs inflating and deflating, denoting life. With as-yet-untreated OCD, anxiety, and depression, my mind was a constantly-racing barrage of horrific “what-ifs” until I held him in my arms again, alive, warm, and breathing. My son’s father is a man of color, and as a police officer has chosen to draw false equivalencies between Black Lives Matter protestors and white supremacists, deny the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic, and espouse rhetoric that directly, negatively affects the way he treats and sees people of color. My son sees this, internalizes his father’s disdain for anti-racism activism which manifests in anxiety and depression. I fear not only for my son’s physical safety, but his emotional and psychological safety and health also.

Now, in the autumn of 2021, it’s been nearly two years since I sent him to school on the bus, racing through early-morning routine of snuggle (my son’s daily imperative before he can start his morning; my chance to memorize him, breathe in his shampoo/sweat/sleep/sweet-skin perfume, match my breath to his), dress, breakfast, brush teeth, shoes on, run-to-the-corner-to-catch-the-bus.

It’s been nearly two years since I last rushed home from work, eagerly awaiting the sight of the little yellow bus coming down our street, his silhouette running from the back of the bus to the door and rushing off the steps to fill my arms with his body and voice and heartbeat.

It’s been nearly two years since I worried in real time about my son dying at school.

In the final moments of the film, the mother is holding her daughter's now-emptied backpack in her left arm, her right hand on the orange door, bracing herself to continue this nightmare, preparing for whatever awaits her on the other side.

"Mom!" we hear a child's voice, "MOM!"

"Mom, lunch!"

The mother turns, in her left arm is her daughter's forgotten lunch. She is back on her front stoop, at her own front door, her daughter racing up the steps to grab her lunch and run back to the bus. Mother is confused, relieved - jerked from her anxious reverie - back to real time. Mere seconds have passed, but the worry begins anew.

Lockdown

As an elementary educator in Columbus, Georgia, I was responsible for teaching dance to over 500 students per week. My room for the first half of the year was half of the gymnasium, where I had to scream over the gym class on the other side of the gym, making classroom management difficult, to say the least. The second half of the year, I moved to the school's theater and used the stage as my classroom. Three of our walls were external, with an unsecured entrance to the street. Because of the uncontained space and auditory overload of the gymnasium, the theater was preferable, and it allowed the students to experience being onstage and learn stage directions in dance class.

Preparing for class one day, I was startled in the middle of my choreography by a uniformed officer appearing at one of my hallway doors. He looked puzzled. “Ma’am,” he started, “are you aware the school is on lockdown?”

Clearly, I wasn’t. The PA in the auditorium hadn’t worked since I’d been employed at the school, my school radio was barely audible over the music I played, so for that drill, I was labeled a casualty. I got called into the principal’s office and reprimanded the next day for “dying” in the drill.

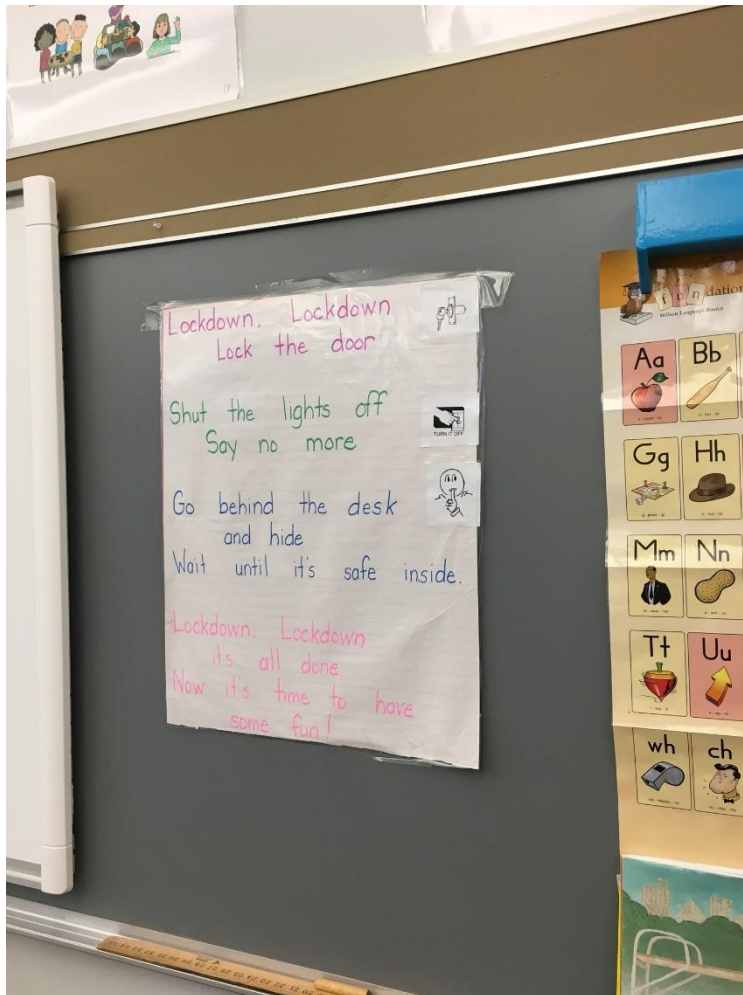


Figure 7. Photo credit: Twitter²⁹

²⁹ A father posted this image to Twitter on his child’s first day of kindergarten.

I was not a “normal” classroom teacher (as in, I didn’t have an actual *room* with four walls and a door, or doors that locked, so lockdown protocol for my class was fuzzy, at best. We had two small bathrooms on either side backstage, and two doors that each led to a corridor. In the event an active shooter entered through our exterior door, there wouldn’t be much I could do to protect any of my students. My son, then 5, was in kindergarten right down the hall, so I knew that should a rampage shooting begin in the theater, to save him I would have to sacrifice myself or sacrifice my students to rush down the hall to save my child. I still don’t know which I would have chosen had the unimaginable happened in our school.

Rules for lockdown are similar in schools across America:

- Lock your door and cover the window (most teachers have a rolled-up piece of paper at the top of their door for this purpose) - that is, if you *have* a door.
- Barricade the door with desks and furniture that students can move by themselves.
- Carry something in your hand to protect yourself should the shooter break through the barricade - this could be a pencil, book, pair of scissors.
- Find your hiding place - either against a wall away from the door, out of sight, in the classroom bathroom, under a desk or table, or anywhere you might not be seen.
- Stay silent.
- Any students that are not in a classroom at the moment lockdown begins may not be let into their classroom. The door must stay locked.
- If you are in or near a bathroom when lockdown begins, crouch on a toilet so the shooter cannot see your feet or head.
- If you are not in a classroom when the school goes into lockdown, remember

Your “Lockdown Song”³⁰ / Run, Hide, Fight / Flee, Fade, Fortify, Fight

³⁰ Elementary teachers often write lyrics (see image on p. 24) to their own lockdown songs using the tune of the alphabet/ “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” or similar lullaby melodies that children can easily memorize. The lyrics I’m most familiar with are:
Lockdown, lockdown, let’s all hide/close the door lights off inside/crouch on down don’t make a sound/and don’t cry or you’ll be found. My son and I recorded a dissonant version of this for the soundtrack in “our sheep to slaughter.”

Many schools and businesses employ ALICE - an acronym for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. This is supposed to be less traumatic for students; however, this training is offered by a business literally capitalizing on the likelihood of a school, business, or place of worship becoming the target of a rampage shooting.³¹

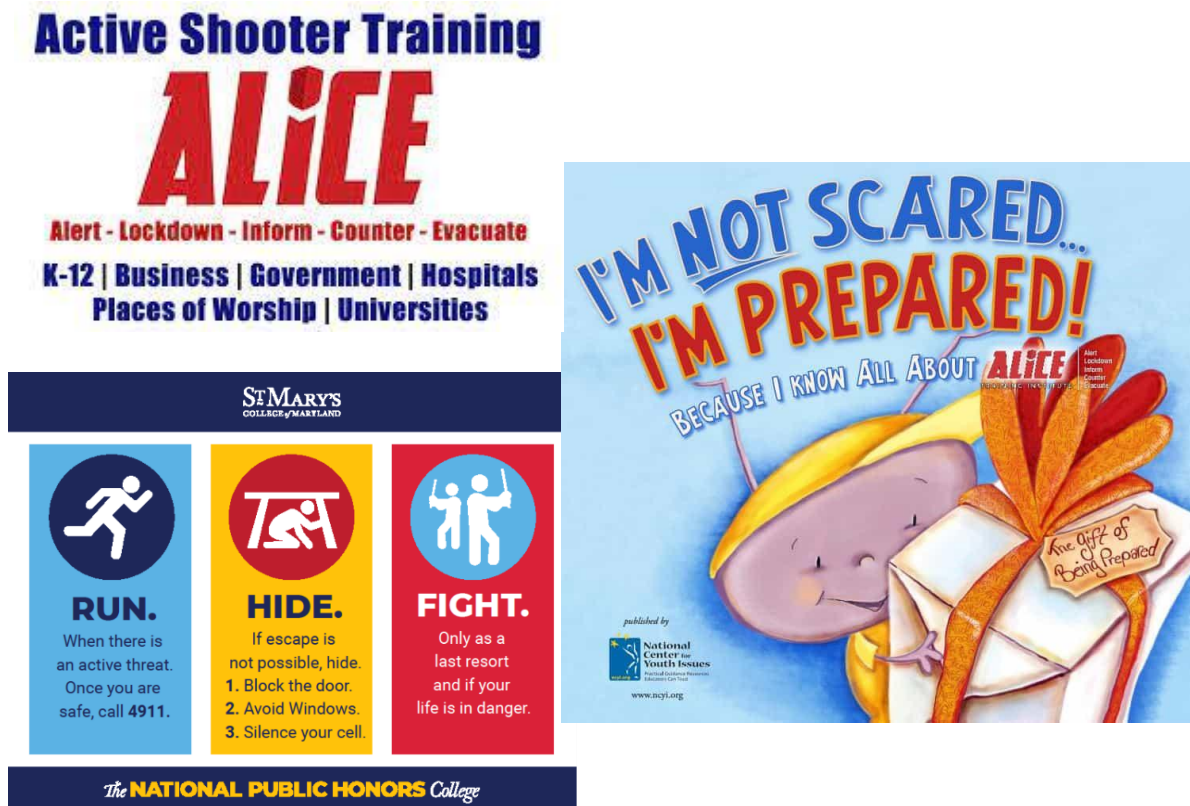


Figure 8. Images from ALICE training and active-shooter training. Clockwise from top left: SACS Consulting advertisement for ALICE training (sacsconsulting.com/2020/11/19/alice-training-matters-find-out-why-here/); “age-appropriate” ALICE training for K-12 “I’m NOT Scared, I’m Prepared!” by Julia Cook, illustration by Michelle Hazelwood Hyde (<https://www.alicetraining.com/our-program/alice-training/k12-education/age-appropriate/>); Run-Hide-Fight graphic from the Office of Public Safety at St. Mary’s College of Maryland (<https://www.smcm.edu/publicsafety/run-hide-fight-active-shooter-protocol/>).

³¹ ALICE is an acronym used in schools and businesses to train for lockdown or active shooter incidents. It stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. ALICE Training. “ALICE Active Shooter Training | Schedule Active Shooter Training & Preparedness Solutions for Schools, Law Enforcement & Organizations.” Accessed September 3, 2021. <https://www.alicetraining.com/>.

Creative Process

Two specific books in my research particularly influenced my writing: *Newtown, An American Tragedy* by Matthew Lysiak, and *Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies That Created the Parkland Shooter* by Andrew Pollack and Max Eden.

Diametric in style, each book was a call to action, in its own way, to end school shootings by relaying the events leading up to, during, and after two high-profile rampage shootings, I was able to find what I believe to be the common thread that may unravel this stalemate on gun control in America. In *Newtown, An American Tragedy*, journalist Matthew Lysiak recounts, factually and meticulously, the life and troubles of Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza, the minute-by-minute events, sights, and sounds, from the beginning of Lanza's rampage through each victim's funeral, and the changes to the town as they found a way to move forward.

Why Meadow Died is emotional, politically polarizing, and provocative; written by a right-wing journalist (Max Eden), a Republican father of a victim of the Parkland, FL shooting (Andy Pollack), and a student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. When I finished these books, my heart was changed. Although I don't agree with Pollack's assertions that schools need more Police/School Resource Officers (SRO) or subject students to the carceral practices of prisons, I read beneath his rhetoric the words of a father in pain that only wishes his daughter had made it home from school alive. Remaining on diametric ends of the gun sense/gun rights debate will do nothing to protect our children or prevent the next rampage shooting. What will make that change is the realization that all parents, regardless of where they stand on issues of guns, gun rights, or gun control, simply want each child to come home from school alive.

Throughout the research and creative process, I endeavored to work in a transformative way, both with the child performers and allow my own beliefs to shift. I entered this thesis process expecting to bolster and defend my belief in abolishing firearms and create a call to action in support of grand measures like a nationwide meltdown of firearms, gun buybacks, and illegalization of firearms for all but a very select few Americans. While I truly do wish those options were viable solutions to the public health crisis of gun crime, I have come to understand that those are simply not feasible outcomes.³² There are too many guns in circulation, too many ‘responsible gun owners,’ too much money flowing between gun rights lobbyists and lawmakers to make an outright ban on firearms a possibility. However, the stage is set for gun reform and the implementation of gun sense legislation such as red flag laws, mandatory reporting between state and federal agencies to keep guns out of the hands of violent offenders and domestic abusers, and hefty fines for unsecured firearms in homes with minors. A large proportion of American gun owners support measures such as the above that would make gun ownership a greater responsibility than driving a car; while it is impossible to determine an actual percentage of individuals that own at least one gun *and* agree with proposed firearm regulations, there is anecdotal evidence to support this claim. Of the gun owners I spoke with, several of which are current or former military officers, each of them agreed that:

- a. High-capacity magazines should not be accessible to the public.

³² “The two ideas - the right to bear arms and gun control - are not mutually exclusive propositions. In fact, America has always had both.” Winkler, *Gun Fight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*, preface.

- b. Open-carry and conceal-carry licenses contribute to violent crime, gun-related deaths, and should not be accessible to the public.
- c. Fines should be imposed for improper storage of a gun in the home resulting in injury or death to a minor.
- d. Fines should be imposed for improper storage of a gun in the home resulting in the weapon being used in a crime, violent or otherwise.
- e. Violent criminals and domestic abusers should be barred from owning a firearm.
- f. Bullets designed for maximum injury should not be accessible to the public.
- g. Bump stocks and other modifications that increase the lethality of a firearm should not be accessible to the public; ownership of a bump stock or similarly modified gun should result in confiscation and fines, and a lifelong ban from owning firearms.

Will everyone who sees my film agree with my position? Probably not. The feedback I received in the beginning of my thesis process was mixed at best; there were major concerns about the image of children handling bullet shells and firearm paraphernalia. I want to make it clear that I worked with these children in a process that was careful and intended to confront the issue of school rampage shootings in a transformative way. I spoke with the parents of the children I worked with, with my son's therapist, and a local gun-sense activist who happens to be both a survivor of gun violence as well as a licensed psychologist about what the impact of this work on the kids could be; the consensus is that children being involved in a performance about something that matters to them and directly affects them is a very rare opportunity. The imagery and sight of their little hands manipulating the brass and lead is powerful and meaningful, and yes, provocative. This is not an image or action I imagined or acted upon frivolously; it is an image common in my part of the country and one that makes the viewers who have seen drafts of the work want to act in favor of gun sense reform.

What makes the sight of bullets in a child's hands so off-putting, disturbing, unsettling? The literal image of small, soft hands handling hard brass harbingers of death, or the *ease* with which they do so? My intention is the latter: the depiction of the *ease*

with which children can access firearms and ammunition. That is the heart of this issue: children handling guns and children killing other children *is not* uncommon in America.

It is worth noting that casting choices for the film have raised questions for some viewers. *Why did you choose a daughter – of color – instead of a son, which you have?* As with all creative projects, there exist infinite unknowns and possibilities when making art, especially when working with children. My first proposal for this work was to create a live, immersive performance featuring myself and my son (who, although it is wholly immaterial to note, is “of color” as he is the product of my first – interracial – marriage). When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, this project shifted to a dance film. I desperately wanted to learn how to direct and produce a film and was fortunate to become acquainted with dancer Jeramy Zimmerman and her daughter, Sidney Hoffman, a real-life mother/daughter duet. Delighted to be in the Director seat, Jeramy, Sid, my son, and I workshopped movement and imagery; Jeramy and Sid would then perform *our sheep to slaughter* as a live work in progress at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City and were integral to the creation of the film. The weekend of filming, Jeramy worked in the black box location with the film crew – me, 1st Assistant Director Courtney Cottle, and Director of Photography Lauren Schrader – for a day of rehearsals and filming by herself. The next day was slated to be an 8-hour day of filming Jeramy and Sidney; however, as it was Sid’s first time working with intense film lighting, she developed a migraine after less than two hours of blocking and filming. By 9 am she was uncomfortable to the point that it wasn’t safe or fair for her to proceed. I had contracted the crew for the specific weekend days and hours, had a limited amount of time to wrap up the shoot inside the black box space (generously offered to me at no charge by the

Charlotte Street Foundation), and had to make an immediate decision: Lauren and Courtney Cottle stepped into co-director positions, my friend Alex Porto agreed to let her daughter, my young Pilates student and dancer Meila Ashman, work on set for the weekend, and I stepped in to portray the mother. We managed to not only catch up after losing over a day's worth of footage, but because of the professionalism and teamwork of the entire cast and crew were able to wrap the shoot on time.

Inspiration

The following are works of art, projects, and installations that comprise the genre of “response to school rampage shooting” art. The only piece of work I was familiar with when I began this project was a statue of a young girl cowering under her school desk, “The Last Lockdown,” which was created by a team of artists in concert with a parent of a victim of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Florida: Parkland artist Manuel Oliver, whose son was murdered by shooter Nikolas Cruz; Caleb Sawyer, a 3D artist who sculpted the statue for fabrication via 3D printing; and Adam Fontenault, who painted and assembled each statue after printing. Ten identical sculptures were created, installed in ten cities across the United States.



Figure 9. *The Last Lockdown* by Manuel Oliver, Caleb Sawyer, and Adam Fontenault.

In the spring of 2021, my thesis mentor, Kyle Mullins, serendipitously found a wrinkled postcard picturing brightly painted bullets arranged in small piles on rocky desert earth, with the Mandalay Bay hotel in Las Vegas hazy in the background. He gave it to me with a note of encouragement in May when we showed a live, in-progress version of *our sheep to slaughter* on the grounds of the Nelson Atkins Museum, bullet brass scattered across the property. Intrigued by imagery so strikingly like my inspiration, I searched the image online to find the artist. I came across Maureen Cain's website and larger project, a series of installations she creates at sites of mass shootings in America. To see another manifestation and quantification of death, the reduction of bullet casings and shells to colorful props and toys was heartening as an artist tackling the same theme; I find the way Cain's images evoke the anxiety and normalization of gun violence in

America striking. Her images also helped me process the critical feedback I received from the Hollins voicing distaste for images of children handling brass and bullets. The Thesis Advisory Committee's (TAC) intense negative response prompted thinking of ways to camouflage and disguise bullets with toys, simultaneously softening and juxtaposing the harshness of bullets in small hands. mixing casings with metal jacks resulted in the sound I wanted to capture as brass hit pavement and provided a striking visual of raining metal. The visual of the tiny, spiky toys evokes physically painful memories as well; there is no more threatening toy for a parent walking barefoot in the dark. About her inspiration, Cain writes:

I started this project when a box of 1,000 rounds of ammunition was mistakenly delivered to my address outside of Seattle. My first thought: "Who knew you could order bullets online?" My second thought: "I need to make art with this." But not with live ammunition, so I called the sheriff's office and they took the bullets away. Instead, I went to firing ranges and collected thousands of bullet casings, or "brass" as I've learned to call them. I washed the brass and painted them cheerful colors. A year and a half later, those same painted casings have traveled border-to-border and coast-to-coast.

I photograph the bullet casings in temporary art installations at sites of mass shootings, police brutality, domestic violence, suicide, genocide, and assassinations. In El Paso, behind the Walmart, I set up 1,000 rainbow-colored casings in the shape of the Great State of Texas. In Ferguson, Missouri, I used the casings to outline a memorial dove embedded in the sidewalk on the street where police killed Mike Brown. I learned the names of Atatiana Jefferson, Oscar Grant, De'Von Bailey.



Figure 10. Photo by Maureen Cain, "United States of Ammunition"



Figure 11. Photograph by Maureen Cain, "Las Vegas, NV" At the site of the deadliest mass shooting in America in the 21st Century, Cain used 1100 painted casings (the number of rounds fired from a window of the Mandalay Bay hotel into a concert crowd below) organized into 58 piles (the number of dead).



Figure 12. Photograph by Maureen Cain, "Littleton, CO" Orange (the defining color used to define the gun sense movement and worn by gun violence prevention activists) painted casings lined up outside of Columbine High School in Littleton, CO. The first school shooting I remember seeing in real time on the news, two teen boys in 1999 killed 13 people and wounded more than 20 other students and teachers before killing themselves.



Figure 13. Photo by Maureen Cain, "Deming, NM" A playground in Deming, New Mexico, a town that made the news for at least two incidents involving children with guns. In 1999 a 12-year-old student shot and killed a 13-year-old classmate at school, and in a more recent incident a 14-year-old boy was caught with a stolen gun at school.

I stumbled upon a news story of artist WhyIsBe's installation, "Back to School Shopping" which the artist describes as "a parody on the issue of mass school shootings, addressing the very real truth that children face a serious threat from guns in schools - with no immediate sign of change."³³ The artist visualizes and brings to life a world where tiny bullet proof vests, lunchboxes filled with kid-sized self-defense weapons, and claw machines full of gun paraphernalia painted playful colors are all part of the back-to-school shopping ritual. Inside each Self Defense Box, or SDB, is a note that reads

WARNING

Going to school or public places may expose children to guns & other lethal weapons in unwarranted hazardous scenarios.



Figure 14. Photo by Kevin Chu. Street view of WhyIsBe's Back to School Shopping installation.

³³ WhyIsBe. "WhyIsBeworldwide.com." Accessed June 1, 2021.
<http://www.whysisbeworldwide.com>



Figure 15. Photos of SDBs by Kevin Chu from WhyIsBe's "Back to School Shopping"



Figure 16. Photograph of artist WhyIsBe's claw machine full of toy guns and children's bulletproof vests from his installation "Back to School Shopping."

The “Active Shooter Bucket” in my son’s ballet studio:

In 2018, I began teaching at Kansas City Ballet School, where my son is also a student. Our staff meeting that year had a new element for the faculty - active shooter training. I was familiar with the drills and statistics from teaching the previous year as an elementary educator in a public charter school, but this was different. Active shooters had been targeting yoga studios and places not accustomed to vigilance against violent threats; in KCB’s spacious, sprawling building full of glass and mirrors and doors without locks, the possibility for carnage suddenly felt very real. In every dance studio, there is a large orange Home Depot bucket filled with items to be used for sanitary, triage and first aid, security, or defense purposes. Suddenly, dance teachers and piano accompanists became potential shields, vigilantes, and first responders. What saddened me the most, however, was the realization in the room that even our youngest students were already familiar with steps to take in an active shooter situation; as Generation Lockdown, they’ve learned this at school since kindergarten. The following is text from emails, handouts, and teacher protocol from this info session.

KANSAS CITY BALLET SCHOOL LOCKDOWN BUCKETS

Lock Down Kits

Bolender Center Lockdown kits are positioned in:

Studio 1 – In the storage closet between the studio and green room

Studio 2 and 3 – in the tall closets

Studio 4-7 – behind the pianos

Johnson County Lockdown kits are positioned in:

Teacher's Changing Room

Children's Changing Room

The items in the buckets should be used for:

Plastic Bucket – Bathroom Needs

Toilet Paper

Wipes

First Aid Kit – Use if there are any wounds

Bandages – Use if there are any wounds

Rubber Gloves – Use if there are any wounds or blood

Tarp – Use to cover children or to put under anyone who is injured and bleeding

Clorox Wipes

Fire Extinguisher – Use to blind assaulter or use as a blunt weapon

Tie Downs – Use to lock door or as handcuffs

Tape – Use to lock door or as handcuffs

Hammer – Use to break a window for escape or as a defensive weapon

Scissors – use to cut tie downs or as a defensive weapon

NOTES FROM KCB ACTIVE SHOOTER TRAINING

...FIGHT. Throw things. Identify potential weapons – scissors, stapler, fire extinguisher, phone. Take away their eyesight (perfume, Febreze, and industrial cleaner, hand sanitizer, hot coffee or tea, wasp spray or a blanket). Use whatever is near you.

You must fight until the attacker is incapacitated – know your ability and be

ready to fight to the end. Once they are incapacitated you may need to keep holding them down or you may flee.

Leave your belongings and get them later.

Know where to go after you exit the building. Do not go into the parking lot as there may be another person there helping/waiting for the shooter.

SUMMARY

FLEE

Know your escape route and plan

Be quiet

Leave the wounded

Keep your hands visible when police are on site

Do not take any elevators

Leave your belongings

FORTIFY

Lock your room

Fortify the Doors

Secure the door with rope or cords

Move children away from door and out of sight of windows and doors Use interior closets

HIDE

Only if shooter has not seen you

Hide out of view

Use bullet proof barriers

Look for access to weapons

Be prepared to take action if the lock fails

Quietly call 911 if you can – they may ask you for the location of the shooter

FIGHT

Be prepared to fight for your life

Know what you can do before you seek out the shooter to fight

- Police Priorities: Neutralize the Threat, Attend to Victims, Do a slow thorough sweep of the building looking for bombs and accomplices, Attend to Bystanders

3 Phases of Live Shooter Event:

Response/Contact

Evacuation

Search

- Shooter Mentality: Hurt as many people as possible and kill self. Once a shooter has killed a person, they know they have no reason to stop, even if the person they killed is the person they initially came for. They know the police are coming.

- Hostage situation – the shooter will know that the police are on their way. It is best to let them get there and do their job, however people will react in different ways and you may feel like you need to do something.

- **If you are in a locked room and there is a child asking you to open the door, but you cannot see if he/she is being held by the shooter, you must decide if you will place the people in the room at risk to save that child by possibly opening the door to the shooter.**

- Once the event has died down and you think the police are on the scene, if someone asks you to open the door, you should have some way to identify them as police. You can ask them to pass their id under the door.

- Do not follow officers when they are in pursuit of the shooter!

- All parties will be checked for weapons and will be interviewed.

Section 2: Observations

- We will have lock-down drills

- We need to create policy and procedure for families, so that they know what to do in the event that they are waiting in the halls with/for their children.

- Because of the music and sound-proof nature of the studios, teachers are unlikely to hear a shooter until they are in the room (unless parents come in). We are in discussion of how to address this in the building.

- Teachers will need to decide on the spot if they will keep the doors open to let people in the hall come in for safety or if they will immediately lock the doors to protect those inside. - Front desk and Hall staff are in the first line of fire and should have better means to identify potential ‘bad guys’ as they enter the building. New security desk should help with this issue.

- Be aware that a shooter in our venue will most likely be a disgruntled employee looking for revenge, or a parent who has gone off the deep end. They may be coming to hurt one

person, many people, or to take their child by force. In any case, you cannot predict what they will do even if they get the person they came for.

- We are discussing a system to make sure ALL people in the building are told

when the event is over.

Section 3: Actions

- Lock-Down Kits in every studio
- Will be establishing a company password/code word for a shooter event. Will have another password/code word for when the event is over.
- Be sure you know the address of the building you are in so that 911 will know where the call came from – or you can leave the phone off the hook. 911 will give you instructions if they can.
- Will establish assembly points outside
- Make sure you keep your roster with you, so you know who is missing.
- Company will establish a Public Liaison – the person who will talk with the media about the event. Only that person should make a statement.
- Our security Guard does not carry.

Conclusion

“Guns are lightning rods of American culture, and in such a charged atmosphere, common ground is hard to find.”

Adam Winkler, Gun Fight

Upon reading my paper and watching my film, (in the words of Jami Milne):

Can you still tell me we don't need stricter gun laws?

Will this [work] save one more child or teacher from being gunned down in the safety of a school?

No.

Will this [work] change gun laws?

No.

This paper examined the effects of rampage shootings at schools in America. It documented the struggle to come to terms with America's gun violence epidemic, and the impotence of American government to effect lasting, meaningful change for stricter gun laws that would undoubtedly save thousands of American lives each year. Perhaps it helped readers re-locate themselves in the fight for gun sense.

The utopian goal of a gun-free America is not realistic. Research suggests that there are, simply, too many guns in circulation in America to effectively abolish civilian gun ownership. Gun sense legislation is polarizing, inert; politicians lack the motivation or ability to scrutinize ease of access to firearms in communities across the nation, and therefore allow gun violence and school shootings to continue unabated. I posited that resolution begins with parents of school children - every parent and caretaker want their child to come home from school alive. If we start with that common goal and work

toward sensible gun laws and, in effect, safer schools, there would be no room for political debate or ideology to affect passing legislation. Further, holding parents accountable when they fail to secure guns and/or ammunition as in the case of the school shooting in Oxford, Michigan, is a step in the right direction. Gun culture is a large part of numerous American communities; being a gun owner is a sense of pride for many. It would make sense that enacting laws placing the onus on adult gun owners for their part in aiding access to weapons (by purchasing for minors or failing to properly secure firearms in the home) used by children in violent crimes will temper the zeal and frivolity with which many parents approach gun ownership.

Liz Whitmere, Toronto-based filmmaker and actress who helped edit my film, said “Clearly, you’re plugged into the zeitgeist,” as we discussed the growing canon of artistic works that challenge viewers and audiences to confront the reality of life in America with guns; *our sheep to slaughter* is merely a different point of view. My hope is that the film humanizes the effect of loosening firearm restrictions, energizes parents to be more vigilant if they have guns in the home, and demonstrates the urgent need for gun-sense action.

USB Contents

our sheep to slaughter

Concept, choreography, direction: Courtney Collado

Music: Evangelos Spanos

Set: John Paul Bernal and Courtney Collado

Editor: Liz Whitmere

Co-editor: Courtney Collado

Performers: Meila Ashman, Courtney Collado

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